



Volunteer Strategy for Suffolk 2025 - 2028



Introduction

Suffolk is a great place to work and live. It has a great sense of community – working both together and individually to support the overall wellbeing of others, and creating better connections. There are so many groups and VCFSE organisations doing good in our communities, that often volunteering can be left unnoticed despite it being a core foundation of community spirit and goodwill.

There is no doubt that volunteering has had its challenges. It has been on the decline for several years, but then increased during the Covid 19 Pandemic, with individuals and organisations stepping up to support each other during that difficult time. We need to look at the way we support our volunteers, retain and sustain them, celebrate and accommodate them. We need to look at our messaging, and the needs of the local communities to see what it is they really want, and what volunteers can offer.

A positive image of volunteering needs to be created, and its benefits highlighted. We also need to champion the diverse range of roles, exploring and celebrating volunteer experiences, and to recognise people for all the great work they do, and the Suffolk organisations they volunteer for.

We have seen in the last three years, volunteer leaders adopting digital training and support for their volunteers - embracing creativity and developing better awareness and understanding of how technology can be used to support volunteering and as such, new volunteer roles have emerged from this innovative thinking. We have seen organisations work collaboratively with each other to be more flexible in their approaches, businesses seek to improve the welfare of their employees, and offer volunteering days through Employer Supported Programmes.

We know that volunteering is changing, and that organisations and businesses need to further adapt to this shifting landscape. We know that Suffolk is a great place to work and live, but more can be done to support our communities, and by working together and strengthening the volunteer sector, we can achieve better outcomes for all.





ACCORDING TO THE CHARITY COMMISSION'S LATEST SECTOR OVERVIEW, **THERE ARE CURRENTLY 7,076,328 VOLUNTEERS GIVING THEIR TIME TO REGISTERED CHARITIES IN ENGLAND WALES**



THE NCVO'S TIME WELL SPENT 2023 REPORT FOUND THAT THE **NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS HAS DROPPED BY 50% SINCE 2018**

ACCORDING TO THE CHARITIES AID FOUNDATION IN 2022, **ONLY 6% OF PEOPLE AGED 16 TO 44 HAVE VOLUNTEERED, COMPARED TO MORE THAN 10% OF PEOPLE AGED 65 AND OVER**

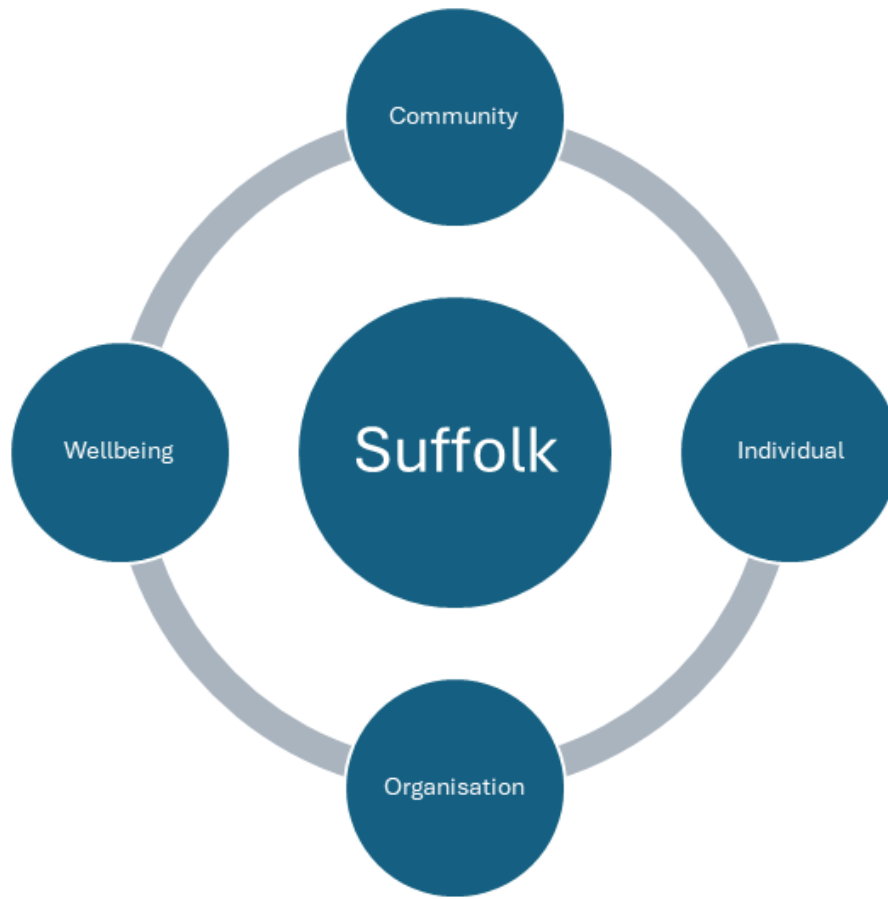


Definition of Volunteering

Volunteering is the commitment of time and energy for the benefit of the community, society, environment or individuals outside immediate family. It is unpaid, and undertaken freely by choice.



Benefits of Volunteering



Community

- Development of communities and resilience
- Increased community cohesion
- Reduction in isolation and loneliness
- Communities supporting each other

Individual

- Personal growth
- Positive and fun experiences
- Development of skills and the learning of new ones
- Increased employment opportunities
- Improved social connections

Organisation

- Ambassadors for the organisation and volunteering
- Increased capacity to deliver activities and services
- Increased links with local community
- Stakeholder engagement

Wellbeing

- Increased mental and physical health and wellbeing
- Social interactions and activities
- Knowing the people in your local community
- Confidence

What is the Vision for Volunteering in Suffolk?

People living in Suffolk are, inspired, encouraged and empowered to volunteer.

Suffolk offers a wide range of volunteering opportunities across a variety of sectors, including environmental conservation, healthcare, education, and social services. This diversity allows volunteers to find opportunities that align with their interests and skills.

The sense of community in Suffolk is strong, fostering a welcoming environment for volunteers. Local organisations and residents often come together, creating bonds and a support networks Suffolk is also known for its beautiful landscapes, historic towns, and cultural heritage, and many volunteering activities are centred around preserving these sites, that can provide enjoyable and rewarding backdrops and experiences for volunteers.

Also at a personal level, volunteering enables individuals to develop new skills, gain experience, and improve their employability. Many organisations provide training and workshops for volunteers.

Volunteers in Suffolk have the chance to make a tangible difference to their communities, whether through supporting vulnerable populations, conserving the environment, or enhancing local amenities.

Volunteering is a great way to meet new people and build friendships. It brings together individuals from diverse backgrounds who share a common interest in helping others.

Many organisations in Suffolk offer flexible volunteering options, allowing individuals to contribute their time in a way that fits their schedules, whether it is a one off activity, or ongoing commitment.

The main volunteering ethos and vision remains unchanged for Suffolk, and we continue to champion the following four values that underpin our Volunteer Strategy, and in probability, they be emphasised more in the next three years:

1. **Inclusivity and Equality:** Volunteering is, and should be open to everyone.
2. **Volunteering is Voluntary:** Volunteering is a choice that is freely made.
3. **Mutual Benefit:** Volunteering benefits those that volunteer, and those that are supported by that volunteering.
4. **Volunteering is diverse:** Volunteering can be formal and informal, and both aspects should be treated as having equal value.

We will look to the recommendations in the State of the Sector report, the recent survey of the Suffolk VCFSE sector, that has emphasis on volunteering. The findings will ensure that volunteering remains at the forefront of the agenda of leaders, and organisation.



A renewed partnership between government and the voluntary sector underpinned by new structures: We have suggested a range of ways in the past in which a government can do this. However, the central point is a commitment from government to working with the voluntary sector, beginning with the design and delivery of policies, programmes, and legislation. (State of the Sector 2024: Ready for a reset NPC)

Objective 1

To raise the profile of Volunteering by inspiring the next generation of volunteers

- To increase and promote the benefits and opportunities to individuals aged 14-25 years, and support this with legacy succession planning
- To engage and collaborate with businesses and organisations to utilise digital technology to increase, and promote more volunteer opportunities
- To encourage and support potential volunteers to find the right opportunities which are diverse, engaging and meaningful
- Celebrate and highlight volunteers and their achievements, whether it is based on formal or informal volunteering

The Government report has identified the following :

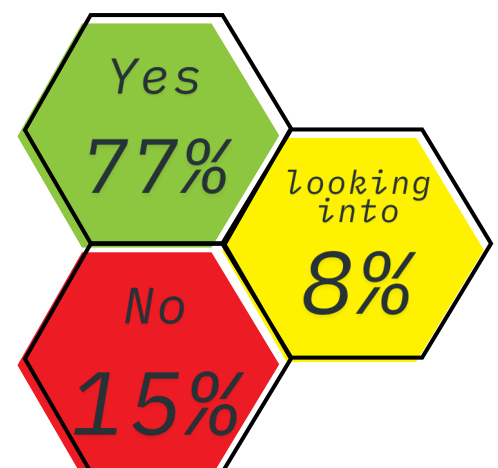
The findings from our research have highlighted three interconnected cross-cutting themes which we explore across different age cohorts, from childhood to early adulthood:

- 1. Establishing a common language for youth volunteering that reflects its hybrid, changing and adaptive nature.***
- 2. Supporting volunteer literacy for all young people so they can understand, navigate, and participate in the increasingly complex volunteering ecosystem.***
- 3. Enhancing youth centred pathways in the Volunteering Journey to grow the youth volunteer base, recognising the background and circumstances of each young person is critical in influencing attitudes to, and frequency of volunteering***

There is research that shows that youth volunteering is wanted, but barriers to this may include finding volunteering information, what opportunities there are, and of course, the legalities of supporting under 18's.

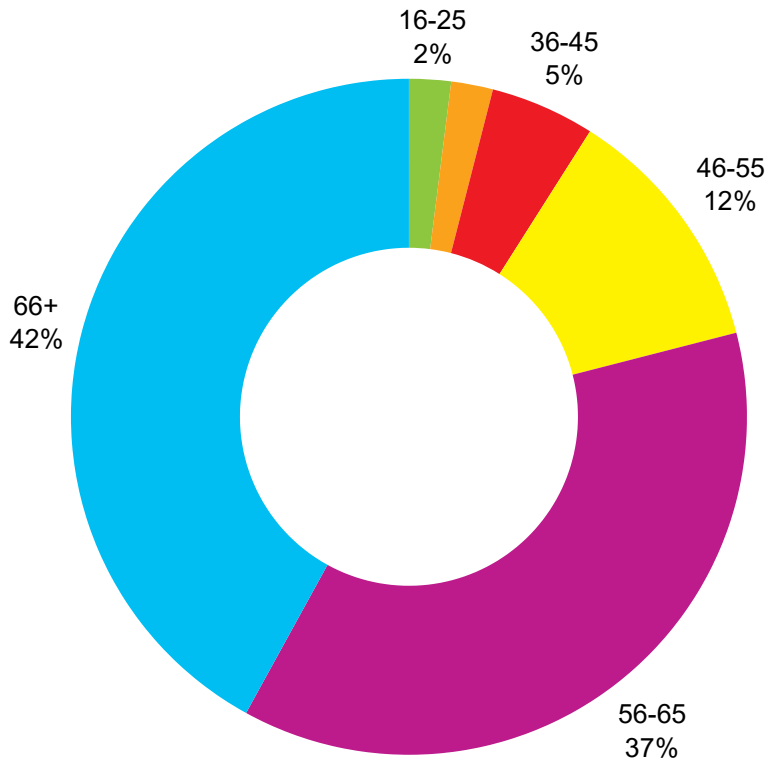
Volunteer Managers Survey

Do you offer Volunteering Opportunities to 14-25 year olds?



Volunteer Survey

Age Groups of Volunteers



Objective 2

To support people to volunteer, and be more engaged in their community to enhance wellbeing and actively encourage participation.

- To forge better working relationships with partners and stakeholders to ensure that individuals can volunteer easily and flexibly in order to share their skills with organisations and their community.
- To support individuals to develop their skills through volunteering, and have access to the relevant training they need through volunteer leaders and organisations.
- To ensure volunteer leaders are also supported in their role to support individuals / groups who volunteer.
- To increase wellbeing, reduce isolation, reduce loneliness and increase social interaction through volunteering.
- To ensure that people are empowered to give their time, use their skills and passion for their local community or organisation, to support and enhance change in their community.

Volunteer for Wellbeing

We look to encourage community members to volunteer for a range of local projects, enhancing their wellbeing and connection to the community.

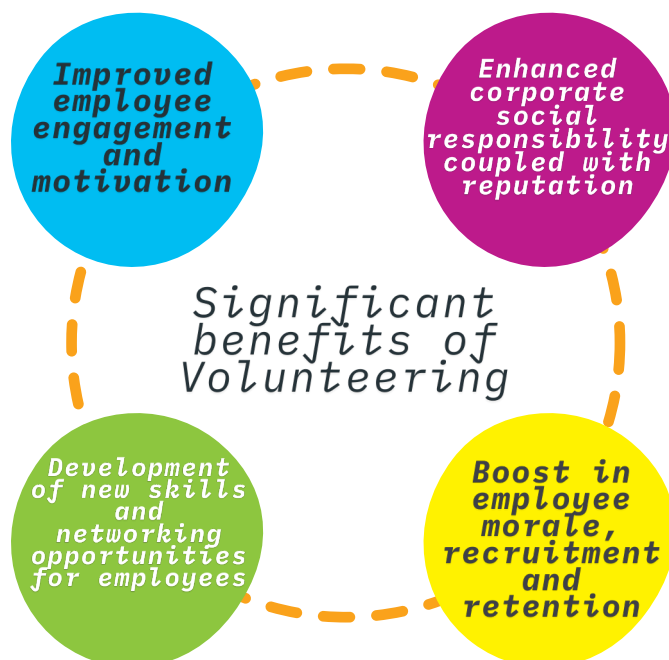
Highlighting the benefits of volunteering, and featuring local organisations in need, what their volunteer opportunities are, and share best practice.

Volunteer Buddies - Pair new volunteers with experienced community members to build confidence, and foster connection and encourage better social interaction.

Objective 3

To promote the use of volunteering to employers and business leaders as a means to support and strengthen their local communities

- To recognise and celebrate the vital contributions that volunteering makes to the Suffolk economy.
- To support organisations to build capacity to enable and manage volunteering opportunities
- To encourage and support employers to initiate a volunteering culture by being flexible and aware of wellbeing for their employees.
- To enable and empower staff to use and offer their skills freely to increase the sense of community, resilience and economic growth in Suffolk.
- Strengthen and collaborate more with Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) through volunteering.



Snapshot from Volunteer Managers

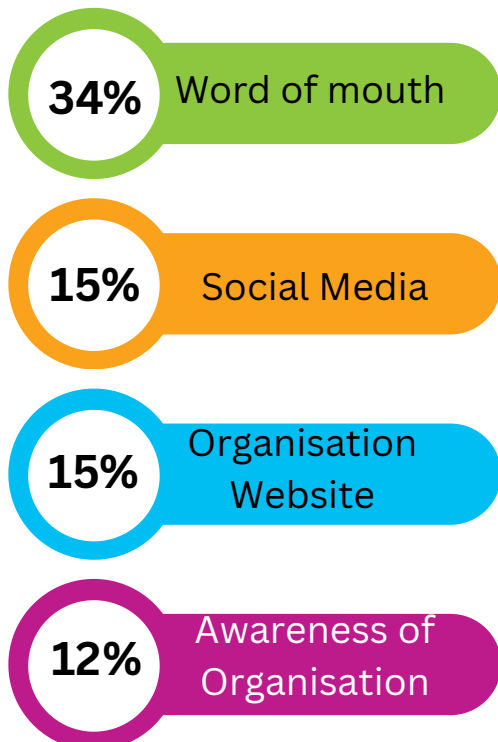
Survey November 2024

We were keen to find out what the barriers are to recruiting volunteers, from the manager's perspective. The results follow below. The emphasis has not changed with time, and the amount of onboarding some managers need in order to enrol volunteers to their organisations.

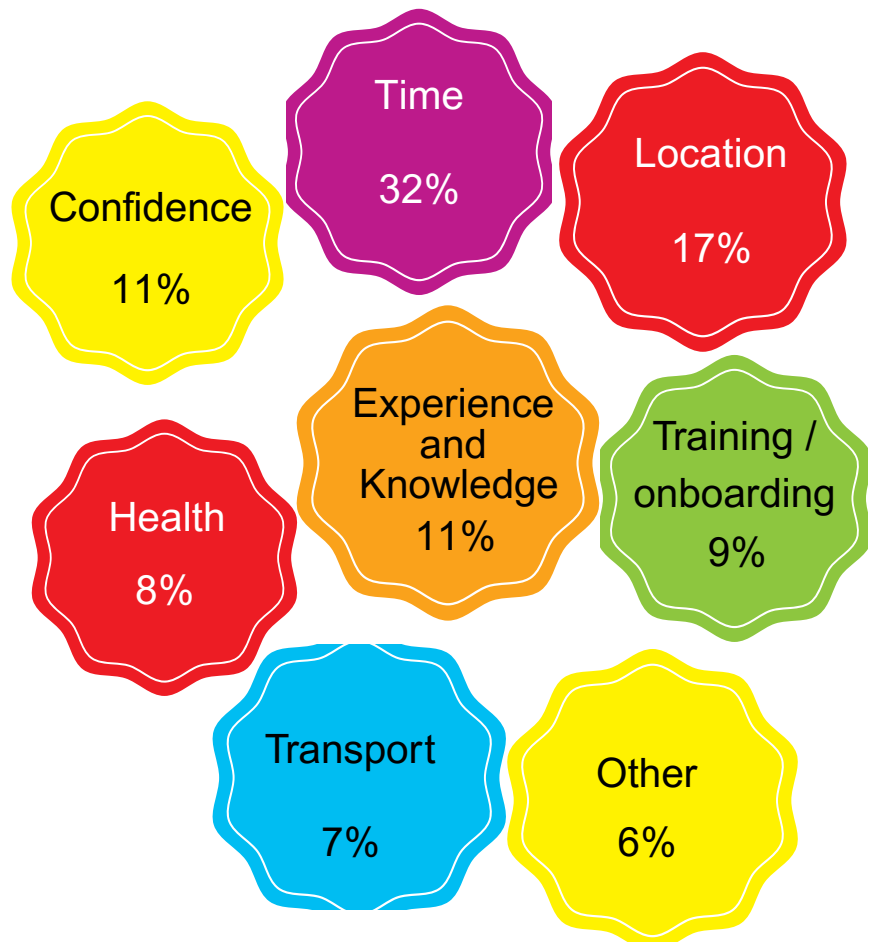
One of the challenges that we have heard regularly within the sector is that organisations find it difficult to recruit volunteers. Again, this is not localised to just Suffolk.



What are your most successful recruitment methods Top 4



Barriers to recruiting volunteers



Snapshot from Volunteer Survey

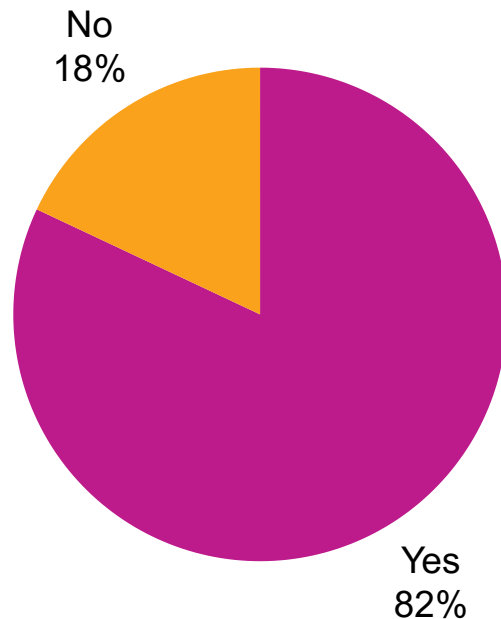
November 2024



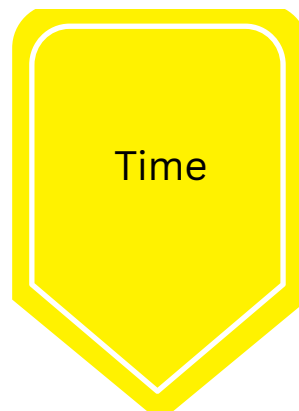
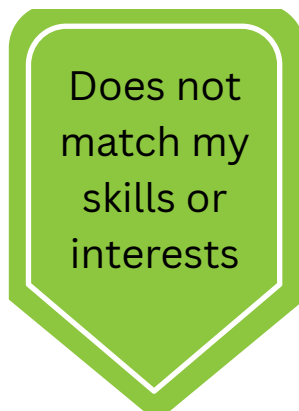
From forums, task and finish groups, sector meetings and feedback, we have heard from many organisations, that individuals are hesitant to volunteer due to concerns about the time required. They may also feel they cannot make a significant commitment. Plus, organisations might not have diverse or appealing volunteer opportunities that match the interests of potential volunteers.

Organisations that lack a strong online presence or easy to navigate websites, can struggle to attract volunteers who are searching for opportunities online.

Are you Currently Volunteering?



Top 4 reasons for not volunteering at the moment



Next Steps

The aim for the next three years, is to engage with our partners and stakeholders in Suffolk to support and promote the good work that is being done in the VCFSE sector to implement volunteer recruitment strategy, and make progress against the outlined objectives. We will together raise aspirations, build awareness, promote the benefits of volunteering, and in doing so strengthen Suffolk's communities.

Our partners and stakeholders will look to utilise the strategy where possible, as a 'live' working document that will be reviewed yearly, enabling us to adapt and check that objectives are in-line with the sector requirements, and the local trends and themes in Suffolk.

We will seek to encourage closer collaborative working across sectors (VCFSE, public, and private) to support with engagement, recruitment, celebration and sustainability of volunteer and volunteering programmes. We will collaborate within the VCFSE sector to support, engage and inform 14–25-year-olds about opportunities, as this is an area to build strong foundations for youth legacy.

We will ensure that the strategy is driven forward by consultation and feedback by all invested partners. That input from stakeholders is valued, and factored in.

We would like to work collaboratively with all stakeholders, and will consider the strategies highlighted in this document that we can drive forward for Suffolk and its communities.



